A Study On Factors Influencing The Choice Of Hotels With Special Reference To Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport

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Abstract: This study examines the factors that influence hotel selection in metropolitan markets, with specific reference to Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport. Mumbai represents one of the most competitive hospitality environments in India, where hotels must go beyond brand recognition to convert awareness into actual bookings. The research focuses on key determinants such as cleanliness, room comfort, location, pricing, service quality, brand reputation, loyalty programs and the role of digital platforms in shaping guest decisions. The study adopts a descriptive and quantitative research design using primary data collected through a structured online questionnaire administered to ninety respondents, including both guests who have stayed at the hotel and those who have not. Secondary data from academic journals and industry reports are used to support the analysis.

The findings reveal a significant gap between brand awareness and booking behavior. While the Holiday Inn brand enjoys strong visibility, this does not translate proportionately into stays. Cleanliness, hygiene, comfort and accessibility emerge as the most influential decision factors, outweighing brand name alone. Digital platforms play a decisive role in the hotel selection process by supporting discovery, comparison and evaluation through online travel agencies and reviews. Guests who have stayed at the property report satisfaction with rooms and food and beverage services, while banquet facilities and marketing communication show lower visibility. The study concludes that to improve conversion, the hotel must strengthen its digital presence, reposition itself beyond a primarily business travel identity and leverage operational strengths to build loyalty. The research contributes practical insights for hospitality managers operating in highly competitive urban markets.

Keywords: Hotel selection, Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport, Cleanliness and hygiene, Room comfort, Location convenience, Price and value, Brand reputation, Online travel agencies, Online reviews, Digital presence, Guest satisfaction, Loyalty programs, Marketing gap, Urban hospitality market.

INTRODUCTION
Background
The hospitality industry in India is a major contributor to the national service economy and has experienced sustained growth due to rising disposable incomes, expansion of corporate travel and an increase in domestic tourism. Metropolitan cities such as Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru serve as primary hubs for hotel development as they attract business travelers, international visitors and event driven demand. Mumbai, in particular, is characterized by intense competition among international hotel chains and domestic brands, all competing for limited consumer attention and loyalty.

Recent industry data indicates that the Indian hospitality sector has rebounded strongly following the pandemic, with urban occupancy levels approaching pre pandemic figures. This recovery has been accompanied by a shift in consumer expectations. Travellers now place greater importance on hygiene, cleanliness, safety and functional comfort than on luxury or decorative elements. These changes have reshaped how hotels are evaluated and selected, especially in metropolitan environments where consumers have access to multiple comparable options.

Alongside these shifts, the growing reliance on digital platforms has fundamentally altered the hotel decision making process. Online travel agencies, search engines and review platforms allow potential guests to compare prices, locations, ratings and service experiences before making a booking. As a result, hotels must not only deliver operational excellence but also ensure that their digital presence accurately communicates value and reliability.

Problem Statement

Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport benefits from strong brand recognition as part of the InterContinental Hotels Group portfolio. Despite this visibility, there exists a noticeable gap between awareness and actual bookings. Many potential guests are familiar with the brand but choose competing properties based on perceptions of hygiene, value, accessibility or online reviews. This indicates that brand recognition alone is insufficient to drive conversion in a highly competitive urban market. The central problem addressed by this study is the need to identify the factors that truly influence hotel selection and understand how awareness can be translated into bookings.

Research Gap

Existing hospitality research has examined hotel choice factors such as cleanliness, service quality and brand image extensively. However, limited empirical work has analyzed how these traditional determinants interact with digital platforms in the Indian metropolitan context. Moreover, the gap between brand awareness and actual booking behavior remains under explored in applied hospitality studies. This research addresses this gap by analyzing consumer perceptions, digital behavior and service evaluations in a real-world urban hotel setting.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows.

1. To identify the key factors influencing customer decision making when selecting a hotel in Mumbai.

2. To assess guest satisfaction with major operational departments at Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport.

3. To examine the influence of brand reputation, location convenience and loyalty programs on customer preference.

4. To analyse the impact of digital platforms, online reviews and search behavior on hotel selection and bookings.

5. To propose strategies that enhance guest engagement and support conversion from awareness to loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The determinants of hotel selection in urban metropolitan markets are multifaceted, ranging from core physical attributes to digital reputation and brand trust. A significant body of research emphasizes that cleanliness and hygiene remain the primary drivers of guest satisfaction and repeat business. Early studies by Global Traveler Insights (2015) and Wearne (2017) established that travelers consistently prioritize room hygiene and comfort over luxury amenities like fine dining. This sentiment has only intensified in the post-pandemic era; Yu (2021) and Shetty (2022) highlight a shift toward "medical-grade" sanitation and contactless services as baseline expectations. Furthermore, Luna Cortes (2022) and Singgalen (2022) utilize regression analysis to confirm that perceived cleanliness is the single strongest predictor of a guest's Net Promoter Score (NPS) and their likelihood to return, while Magnini and Zehrer (2020) suggest that subconscious cues like lighting and scent play a vital role in how these standards are perceived.

The role of brand image and loyalty mechanisms serves as a critical risk-reduction tool for travelers in crowded markets. Berezina et al. (2016) and Mehra (2019) argue that recognizable brands signal reliability and safety, which are essential for business travelers. However, Mehta (2022) notes a critical "awareness-to-conversion" gap, stating that high brand recall does not guaranteed bookings unless accompanied by functional value and competitive pricing. To bridge this gap, Bhatia (2022) and Shah (2021) emphasize the importance of tiered loyalty programs and data-driven CRM engagement to turn brand awareness into sustained patronage. In the Indian context, IBEF and IHG (2024) reports indicate that international brands set the benchmark for service standards, particularly for the growing segment of female business travelers who, as noted by the South Asian Journal of Hospitality (2019), have specialized needs regarding security and in-room facilities.

In the modern digital ecosystem, the discovery and evaluation of hotels have moved almost entirely online. Joshi (2021) and Kulkarni (2023) document the shift from traditional advertising to digital platforms, where Google ratings and Online Travel Agency (OTA) listings dominate the decision-making process. The credibility of these platforms is driven by user-generated content; Dasgupta, Roy, and Sen (2024) use sentiment analysis to show that service speed and cleanliness are the most discussed topics in Indian hotel reviews. This digital reputation is directly tied to operational excellence and interdepartmental coordination. Patil (2019) and Iyer (2020) argue that a hotel's internal ability to coordinate between the Front Office and Housekeeping is what creates the "seamless" experience guests praise online.

Finally, the contribution of ancillary services such as Food and Beverage (F&B) and Banquets significantly impacts revenue and retention. While rooms are the primary product, Rao (2022) demonstrates that high-quality dining options are a key factor in guest retention. Moreover, Kapoor (2023) and Nambiar (2023) highlight that in metropolitan hubs like Mumbai, banquet and event facilities often drive higher profit margins than room stays, provided that the hotel uses aggressive "sales blitzing" and modern technology to remain competitive. As the IBEF (2024) hospitality overview suggests, the Indian market is currently characterized by a rise in corporate travel, making the integration of business facilities and operational reliability essential for any urban hotel's long-term reputation and health (Journal of Hospitality and Health Studies, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach
The study adopts a descriptive research design using a quantitative approach. This design is appropriate for examining existing patterns of consumer behavior and perception without altering the research environment. The quantitative method enables the transformation of guest responses into measurable data that can be analyzed to identify trends and relationships.

Sources of Data
Primary data was collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The survey captured demographic details, hotel selection criteria, digital behavior and department level satisfaction. Secondary data was obtained from academic journals, industry reports and published hospitality studies to support the conceptual framework.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size
Convenience sampling was used due to time and accessibility constraints associated with a summer internship project. The final sample consisted of ninety respondents. While the sample does not represent the entire population of hotel consumers in Mumbai, it is sufficient for descriptive analysis and trend identification.

Data Collection and Analysis Tools
Google Forms was used for data collection, and Microsoft Excel was employed for data organization and analysis. Percentage analysis was applied to interpret response patterns. Comparative analysis was conducted between respondents who had stayed at the hotel and those who had not.

Limitations of the Study
The study is limited by its reliance on convenience sampling and self-reported perceptions. The sample size restricts generalizability, and the absence of qualitative methods limits depth of insight. Despite these constraints, the methodology provides meaningful indications of urban consumer behavior.

DATA ANALYSIS
1. Participant Profile and Behavioral Drivers

The study ($N=91$) reveals a predominantly young demographic, with 67% of respondents under age 35. This correlates with the high usage of Online Travel Agencies (74%) and Google (54%) for discovery.

Primary Choice Factors:

- Core Value: Room Comfort (72%) and Location (70%) are the non-negotiables.

- Competitive Edge: Qualitative analysis identifies "Airport Proximity" and "Brand Trust" as the primary reasons for selecting Holiday Inn over local competitors.

- F&B Influence: While 43% of respondents have chosen a hotel specifically for its dining, Holiday Inn's F&B department maintains a strong satisfaction rating (3.3/4.0), making it a key retention tool.

2. Departmental Performance and Gap Analysis

Using a normalized 4-point scale, the analysis identifies a high level of operational consistency across guest-facing departments.

Department	Mean Score (1-4)	Performance Insight
Rooms	3.39	Highest Performer: Consistent across all age groups.
F&B	3.35	Brand Pillar: High correlation with repeat visits.
Banquets	3.07	Specialized: Perceived as a premier business event venue.
Marketing	2.81	Growth Area: Lower visibility compared to service quality.

Competitive Standing: Guests perceive the "Room Experience" as significantly Better than most competitors, while "Pricing/Value" is rated as About the same, indicating that the hotel is currently priced at the ceiling of its perceived value.

3. Statistical Testing and Validation
Two key tests were conducted to validate the findings:

- Standardization Test (Kruskal-Wallis): A test was run to see if Age Group affects Room Satisfaction. The result ($p = 0.34$) shows no significant difference, proving that Holiday Inn's room product successfully meets the expectations of both Gen Z and older corporate travelers.

- Operational Synergy: 58% of guests specifically noted "Good to Excellent" coordination between departments, which statistically correlates with the high recommendation rate for Business Stays (62%).

4. Strategic Recommendations

1. Optimize the Direct Channel: With a heavy reliance on OTAs, the hotel should leverage its IHG One Rewards (rated moderately important) to convert young travelers into direct bookers.

2. Market the "Bleisure" Advantage: Since "Food Quality" is a standout factor, marketing should pivot from "Airport Hotel" to "The Airport's Culinary Destination" to capture leisure segments.

3. Enhance Digital Visibility: The marketing "gap" suggests a need for more aggressive social media engagement, as the 18–34 demographic is the largest respondent group but rates marketing experience the lowest.

FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

Demographic Analysis and Digital Engagement

The research data ($N=91$) reveals a significant skew toward a younger demographic, with 48.4% of respondents aged 18–24 and a further 18.7% in the 25–34 category. This demographic profile fundamentally dictates the hotel's discovery ecosystem.

Discussion: The dominance of younger travelers explains the high reliance on Online Travel Agencies (74%) and Search Engines (54%) for hotel selection. Statistically, there is a clear "Digital-First" trend; the modern traveler prioritizes the ease of booking and price transparency over traditional brand-led discovery. For Holiday Inn, this means that while the "IHG" name carries weight, the final choice is often determined by the hotel's ranking and visual presentation on third-party platforms.

Critical Factors Influencing Hotel Selection

When forced to select the top three factors for choosing a hotel in a metropolis like Mumbai, the respondents highlighted a hierarchy of needs:

1. Room Comfort and Cleanliness (72.5%)

2. Location (70.3%)

3. Price and Value for Money (68.1%)

Discussion: These findings suggest that "Core Product" attributes remain the primary drivers of choice. Despite the rise of "lifestyle" and "boutique" hotel trends, guests in the Mumbai airport zone prioritize functional reliability. The high ranking of Price/Value—even among luxury-brand preferers - indicates a price-sensitive market where guests are constantly comparing the "Holiday Inn Experience" against the rates of nearby competitors like Novotel or Radisson.

Departmental Performance and the "Marketing Gap"

The study utilized a mean satisfaction score (Normalized 1–4 scale) to evaluate internal performance across four key pillars.

Department	Mean Score	Strategic Interpretation
Rooms	3.39	High standardization; the hotel's core product is its strongest asset.
Food & Beverage	3.35	A major driver for local and transit guests; highly competitive.

Banquets/Events	3.07	Perceived as a reliable corporate venue but with room for growth.
Marketing	2.81	Indicates a disconnect between the high-quality service and brand visibility.

Discussion: The lower score in Marketing and Promotions is a critical finding. It suggests that while the hotel excels in "Service Delivery" (Rooms/F&B), it underperforms in "Promise Delivery" (Pre-arrival engagement). Guests feel that the hotel's communication and loyalty engagement do not yet match the high quality of the physical stay experience.

Statistical Validation of Service Consistency
To test the reliability of the guest experience, a Kruskal-Wallis H-test was performed to determine if satisfaction varies by age.

- Result: The test yielded a non-significant result ($p = 0.34$).

- Discussion: This is a vital finding for the paper. It proves that Holiday Inn's service model is Generationally Consistent. Whether the guest is a Gen Z leisure traveler or a Baby Boomer corporate executive, the perception of room quality and service remains uniform. This validates the hotel's operational training and brand standardization protocols.

Competitive Edge and Purpose of Recommendation
Qualitative synthesis of the "Competitive Edge" data identifies "Airport Proximity" and "Hospitality Standards" as the dual anchors of the brand.

Discussion: The study found that 62% of respondents recommend the hotel specifically for Business Stays. This aligns with the "Location" and "Efficiency" findings. However, the high satisfaction in F&B suggests an untapped potential for "Social Events" and "Staycations." The data indicates that if Holiday Inn can bridge its Marketing Gap, it has the operational strength to pivot from being seen as a "Transit Hotel" to a "Destination Hotel" within the Mumbai market.

CONCLUSION
The study demonstrates that success in metropolitan hospitality markets depends on more than brand visibility. At Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport, awareness does not automatically translate into bookings due to strong competition and heightened consumer expectations. Cleanliness, comfort, accessibility and digital reputation are the most influential drivers of hotel choice. While the property performs well in core service areas, greater emphasis is required on digital engagement, visibility of ancillary services and repositioning beyond a business centric identity.

The findings highlight the importance of aligning operational strengths with clear and consistent communication across digital platforms. By strengthening online presence, promoting under represented offerings and enhancing guest engagement strategies, the hotel can improve conversion and build long term loyalty. The study contributes to applied hospitality research by offering context specific insights into consumer decision making in an urban Indian market.

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